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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 001236

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TAGS: I2 MOPS PTER PREL PGOV

SUBJECT: CG'S APRIL 5 MEETING WITH THE PM

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Margaret Scobey. Reasons : 1.4 (b) and (d).

**¶1. (S) SUMMARY:** On April 5, MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus and DCM Speckhard met with PM Maliki and discussed the following issues:

-- Engagement: Maliki discussed his meeting with the commander of an insurgent group which now wanted to join the fight against Al Qaeda;

-- Detentions: Maliki said that rising tensions, including complaints from Grand Ayatollah Sistani, justified a slow down in detention operations, particularly against Shia militia such as the Sadrists. He also asked that the case files of a number of long-term detainees be reviewed to determine whether they could be released;

-- Qais Khazali: Maliki asked for information about how recently Khazali had been engaged in violent activities, noting that he had believed Khazali a moderate he could use to split the Sadrist movement;

-- Possible Political Crisis: Maliki said that Tawafiq was discussing withdrawing from the government. The withdrawal might coincide with the Neighbors Conference. He discounted the possibility that this would lead to the collapse of the government, but did express concerns about how the press would react. He speculated that former interim PM Ayad Allawi might support the Tawafiq withdrawal, arguing that it was obvious that he was trying to create problems for the government;

-- Neighbors Conference: Maliki said that he had agreed to a ministerial-level meeting in Egypt. When the DCM asked whether Secretary Rice should send an envoy to the region now, he said that he would think about the issue and get back to us with an answer (Note: PM COS later called DCM to confirm that the PM was comfortable with an U.S. envoy traveling to key capitals in advance of the conference. End note.);

-- BIAP/CAB Compromise: Maliki agreed that his Chief of Staff, Tariq Abdullah, would accompany a Coalition team to the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) to work out final details about the use of the airport by the incoming Coalition Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB). At the same time, he made clear that the deployment needed to be done in such a fashion that those using the commercial, civilian terminal would not think they had entered an armed, U.S. military base;

-- Diwaniyah: Maliki rejected Petraeus' suggestion that he

call the Diwaniyah governor to seek his support for the upcoming operation, adding that if the governor opposed the operation he would be replaced by a state of emergency. Maliki said he wanted Iraqi Special Operations Forces to target three to six key individuals in Diwaniyah after the 8th Iraqi Army Division had surrounded the city;

-- Site 4: Petraeus pressed Maliki to take action against MG Mehdi. Maliki promised to review the evidence against Mehdi;

-- Al Qaim Border Point: Maliki agreed to travel to Al Qaim in early May to reopen the border point there, if he could be convinced that sufficient forces existed to protect the border; and

-- Delivery of U.S. weapons: Petraeus reported that 2,400 U.S. M-4 carbines had arrived in Iraq and said that 2,500 M-16s would arrive in two weeks. Maliki pressed him to accelerate other weapons shipments, as well. END SUMMARY

#### Maliki On Engagement and Reconciliation

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¶2. (S) PM Maliki said that he had recently met with an insurgent commander with ties to Al Qaeda. He said that the commander -- who admitted his group had been involved in the torture and killing of 55 Shias -- had come to see Al Qaeda as the primary threat to Iraq, although he still wanted to fight the Coalition. Maliki said that he had told him that since the Coalition was in the country at the invitation of the GOI it would be a betrayal and a violation of religion to continue to fight against it. Maliki said that he went on to tell the commander that if he would stop fighting Iraqis and the Coalition, and would fight Al Qaeda instead, he would

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support him. Maliki said that the commander was now asking for equipment he could use in the fight against Al Qaeda. Maliki said that he was going to forgive him for killing the 55 Shia (admitting that if this came out his own life might be at risk), adding that perhaps other insurgent groups could be turned by the example. (Note: The commander came alone to Maliki, escorted by a GOI officer. Maliki said he told him that he need not worry about being harmed or followed because "in our tradition" if you come alone, you can leave alone.)

¶3. (S) MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus agreed that other groups might follow, but cautioned that it was important to think through how groups such as this could be used. As an example, Petraeus said that the tribes in Anbar were working with the police and army, resulting in some degree of civil control over them. Petraeus warned against the dangers of creating a "tribal police." Maliki agreed, adding that he had told Minister of Interior Bolani to redistribute the police in Anbar so that each tribe would not have its own police force.

#### Detention Concerns; Slow Down Requested

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¶4. (S) Noting that military operations needed to be conducted with the political environment in mind, Maliki said that the number of detentions and deaths was creating a tough situation for the government. He said that tensions were escalating and that -- if something was not done to alleviate them -- they might lead to an explosion. He said that Grand Ayatollah Sistani had called him to complain about the situation. Maliki said that he thought a slow down, particularly against Shia targets such as the Sadists, was necessary. He was quick to add that there were still several Shia targets he wanted to move against. He asked Petraeus to meet with the Sadists, arguing that they were weakened and "had gotten the message." In addition, he asked Petraeus if he would review the case files of some detainees who had been held a long time to determine whether they could be released. Maliki predicted that if efforts at reconciliation bear

fruit, the GOI would engage in a "big time" amnesty program.

¶ 15. (S) Agreeing to review some of the case files, Petraeus said that he wanted to help Maliki navigate Iraq's political waters. At the same time, however, he pointed out that the Coalition was taking relatively little action against Shia militias when compared to the number of operations it was carrying out against Al Qaeda and its affiliates.

Oais Khazali

¶ 16. (S) Noting that he had believed Oais Khazali a moderate he could use in his political strategy to split the Sadrists movement, Maliki asked Petraeus about the dates of the most recent operations that Khazali could be linked to. He said he wanted to determine whether Khazali had continued engaging in violent activities even after Maliki had begun engaging him. Petraeus showed Maliki some information relating to the case that indicated Khazali had probably at least been involved in the planning of violent activities as recently as late February or early March 2007. Petraeus said the Coalition wanted to reinforce Maliki's efforts to engage true moderates among the Sadrists.

Political Crisis Looming?

¶ 17. (S) PM Maliki said that Tawafuq had missed the April 4 Policy Council for National Security (PCNS) because the party had been meeting to discuss whether it should withdraw from the government. He said that the withdrawal might be timed to coincide with the ministerial-level Neighbors Conference meeting (see below). Noting that some members of Tawafuq had obviously come to him about this discussion, Maliki said he was not worried about the government falling. He said he was concerned, however, about the impact any such attempt would have on how the government is viewed in the world's press -- particularly if it happens when the world is watching the Neighbors Conference.

¶ 18. (S) Maliki said that former interim PM Ayad Allawi might support Tawafuq's withdrawal. He argued that Allawi was "obviously" trying to create problems for the government, citing as evidence Allawi's call for the constitution to be canceled. He said that he thought Allawi was trying to take

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advantage of the charged political climate in Washington (which he said was damaging to Iraq). He added that Allawi might have some support within the Shia coalition, particularly from the Al-Fadhila Party.

Neighbors Conference

¶ 19. (S) Maliki said that he had agreed to hold the ministerial-level Neighbors Conference in Egypt. Noting that Secretary Rice was prepared to send an envoy to the region to

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obtain the guarantees sought by the PM, the DCM asked Maliki if the envoy could be sent right away. Maliki said that he would think about the issue and get back to the DCM with an answer. Maliki used the discussion of the Neighbors Conference to stress the need for improved U.S. relations with Iran and Syria.

BIAP/CAB Compromise on the Horizon

¶ 10. (S) MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus said that Tariq Abdullah, Maliki's Chief of Staff, had been very helpful in working out a compromise on the use of the Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) by the incoming U.S. Combat

Aviation Brigade (CAB). Maliki said that Abdullah would accompany a Coalition team to BIAP to work out final details. Maliki stressed, however, that he wanted the CAB to be as invisible as possible to the airport's civilian traffic. He noted the recent Saudi statement against the continuing "foreign occupation" of Iraq, arguing that the statement had been aimed at him as much as at the Coalition. He said that as a result he did not want those using the civilian airport to feel that it had been occupied by the U.S. military. In addition, Maliki said he was concerned that military operations might interfere or cause delays with civilian traffic. He also expressed concerns that companies providing needed services at the airport might not want to operate there, fearing that the military presence would make the airport a more attractive target.

¶11. (S) While on the subject of the airport, Maliki asked Petraeus if he could take actions to improve its commercial viability. Noting that the cork-screw landing approach required scared off commercial traffic, Maliki asked whether the Coalition could improve security around the airport sufficiently to allow for a more normal approach. He also asked about flight routings that cause flights to be much longer than should reasonably be expected. The DCM and Petraeus said that many of these issues were properly civilian aviation issues, but undertook to look into the issue of air space control.

Diwaniyah

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¶12. (S) Noting that operations in Diwaniyah might start later that night, Petraeus suggested that Maliki might want to call the governor to inform him and ask him for his support. Maliki was not inclined to do so, arguing that if the governor -- who he described as "very weak" -- did not support the plan he would remove him and institute a state of emergency.

¶13. (S) Maliki cited one of his commanders, General Othman, as stating that he thought the situation in Diwaniyah could be significantly changed for the better with the capture of only three to six key individuals. As a result, the PM said he wanted the Iraqi 8th Army Division to surround the town and the Iraqi Special Operations Forces to launch targeted raids against these individuals. The PM also said he paid seven billion Iraqi dinars to the Facility Protection Service in Diwaniyah in order to guarantee their loyalty.

CG Presses on Site 4

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¶14. (S) Congratulating Maliki for the April 2 investigative hearing into one of the Ministry of Interior officers accused in the infamous Site 4 torture case, Petraeus asked Maliki when he intended to go after MG Mehdi Sobiah. Maliki told Petraeus that Minister of Interior Bolani had told him on the phone that Mehdi had been investigated and cleared. Petraeus and the DCM told Maliki that this was not the case, adding that Mehdi had ordered and participated in the torture. When Maliki offered to bring him the file on the case, Maliki promised to review it.

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Al Qaim Border Point

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¶15. (S) Petraeus asked Maliki if he would be interested in traveling in early May to Al Qaim to reopen the border there, pointing out that the trip would be great outreach to the Sunnis in Anbar. Maliki said he would go, but would need to be convinced that sufficient forces were located in the area before he would agree to reopen the border.

U.S. Weapons for Iraq

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¶16. (S) Petraeus reported 2,400 U.S. M-4 carbines had arrived and were being delivered to Iraqi Security Forces, adding that 2,500 M-16 assault rifles and ammunition would arrive in approximately two weeks time. When Maliki asked him to look into accelerating further deliveries of Iraqi-ordered U.S. weapons and equipment, Petraeus promised that American factories were building the weapons as fast as they could.

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